He was happy, Kirk realized with a certain degree of surprise as he stood one night combing his master's hair. Spock had taken him hunting several times, and he knew that he had acquitted himself well. In addition Spock was now more relaxed with him, permitting him to express his opinions, and even to disagree with his master in discussion when they were alone. Although in company he still had to act the part of the petted pleasure slave, he knew that he was now considered, by his master and his friends, as more than just an expensive ornament.

"What are you thinking of, Jim?" Lately Spock had taken to using the more personal form of his given name when they were alone.

"I was just--" Kirk hesitated. His pride would not let him admit that he was finding a measure of contentment in his new life. "I was wondering about your hair. On my world, there were warriors who grew their hair, but not as long as this. Surely it's a handicap in battle. It would be so easy for an enemy to catch hold of it."

"You are partly right, James. Have you not noticed that Selon and his captains wear their hair shorter than mine?"

At Kirk's nod he continued. "When a youth is selected for warrior training, he begins to grow his hair. It is not cut again until he is a fully-fledged warrior. During my years as a cadet I must learn all the skills of a fighting man. I must prove that I can obey orders, and give them. I am not permitted to marry, but I must father two children on women selected for me in order to continue my family line. Then, if I am judged worthy, I will be accepted into the ranks of the warriors, and my hair will be cut and dedicated to our ancestors. From that time I must not touch a woman--that is why no females are permitted in camp, so that even in our time of need, we will not desire them."

"Will your training last much longer? Kirk asked.

"A few months, no more. I have already fathered one child. Soon I will return home and my father will have made the arrangements for the second. Once the child is conceived I will return to the camp for a final testing."

"I see." Kirk finished his task in silence, puzzled by the feeling of instinctive denial that had swept over him when he thought of Spock with a woman. Perhaps he was unconsciously adopting the attitude of the warriors? Sometime soon, when his master was pleased with him, he would ask if arrangements could not be made for him. He did not think he could continue much longer in a celibate state.

Despite the improvement in his conditions, Kirk was still desperately lonely. Spock was often absent for hours at a time, engaged in those aspects of warrior training that were forbidden to a slave.

Nor was he allowed to associate with his fellow slaves, for he was still a pleasure slave, although he was being trained to bear arms, and he was jealously secluded. More, the slaves themselves if they caught him unprotected, might sieze the opportunity to sample such a prize. His training might help him defeat one or two, but against a group of determined assailants he would stand no chance. With memories of Savak's friends, and having seen how some of the slaves watched him, Kirk was forced to admit that Spock's restrictions were for his own protection; reluctantly but realistically, he spent most of those hours in the tent.

The closest he came to friendship was with Jorith, the Pavan slave assigned to Spock for general duties. Several years older than Kirk, he too had at one time been a pleasure slave, but with the loss of his youth and freshness had come relegation to the ranks of the common camp drudges. This demotion, however, had also lessened the strictness of his confinement, which now seemed to make possible a long-cherished dream--escape.

Jorith had watched the young Human with a degree of pity; something about the youth made him different from most of the others. Perhaps it was the lonliness that showed in the hazel eyes, or the memory of the nights he himself had spent in the beds of a succession of masters. Whatever the reasor the Pavan took the risk of mentioning his plans.

He had been waiting for a suitable opportunity, and one afternoon as he went about his duties in Spock's tent, the flap was drawn aside and the Human stalked in. His expression mingled embarrassment and anger, and the Pavan jumped up, alarmed.

"Jim, what's wrong?"

"Those Vulcans!" Kirk threw down the bow he was carrying and shrugged off the quiver. "I don't know how much more of this I can stand!"

"Did the master hurt you?"

"Not physically," Kirk laughed bitterly. "Sometimes I think I could stand that better. We were at archery practise, Spock and I, when the Warleader came up with two warriors who are visiting the camp. They stood there, the four of them, looking me over like a pedigreed animal...discussing my... my points! They even asked Spock what I was like in bed. I feel like a whore!"

"To them you are," Jorith said quietly. "You chose to live in slavery. No Vulcan would have done that. And there is no other way you <u>can</u> live in slavery. Spock treates you well now. You're a novelty, so he's protective, possessive, but when the novelty wears off, he'll begin to lend you out. And when he's tired of you, he'll sell you without a second thought. I know, Jim, I've been through it."

"I can't live like this!"

"Can't you? Have you really considered the alternative. If you ran, they would hunt you down and die like the Andorian. Or, if you did win free, you might live, for a while, with other escaped slaves. There is no luxury there. Here--I see how you live, dressed in silk, the most envied slave in camp. The master even talks to you as though you were an equal."

"But he never forgets--I never forget--that I'm a slave. But I'm not <u>free</u>, Jorith. I would rather be free for a day and dead tomorrow than stay here until I <u>am</u> a slave in my soul!"

Kirk's impassioned words hung on the air, and something in the Pavan's face made him pause. He started to speak, then turned away busying himself with his work. Sudden suspicion made the Human lower his voice. There were only two reasons the Pavan could have for listening to this tirade, trying to dissuade him. And Kirk did not think the Pavan was a betrayer.